
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A Tribute



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ABRAHAM LINCOLN : *A Tribute*

This is the remarkable poem in which on, May 6, 1865, London "Punch" confessed its error, after having for four years lampooned Lincoln with pencil and with pen. In this change of sentiment Punch merely reflected the prevalent British temper, which, fiercely and contemptuously hostile to the national cause and the Union leaders during the earlier and critical part of the death-grapple, swung toward the victor North at the end.

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A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

YOU lay a wreath on murdered Lincoln's bier,
You, who with mocking pencil went to trace,
Broad for the self-complacent British sneer,
His length of shambling limb, his furrowed face,

His gaunt, gnarled hands, his unkempt, bristling hair,
His garb uncouth, his bearing ill at ease,
His lack of all we prize as debonair,
Of power or will to shine, of art to please.

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

You, whose smart pen backed up the pencil's laugh,
Judging each step, as though the way were plain ;
Reckless, so it could point a paragraph,
Of Chief's perplexity, or people's pain.

Beside this corpse, that bears for winding-sheet
The Stars and Stripes he lived to rear anew,
Between the mourners at his head and feet,
Say, scurril-jester, is there room for you ?

ABRAHAM LINCOLN : A TRIBUTE

Yes, he had lived to shame me from my sneer,
To lame my pencil, and confute my pen —
To make me own this hind of princes peer,
This rail-splitter a true born king of men.

My shallow judgment I had learnt to rue,
Noting how to occasion's height he rose,
How his quaint wit made home-truth seem more true,
How, iron-like, his temper grew by blows.

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

How humble yet how hopeful he could be:

How in good fortune and in ill the same:
Nor bitter in success, nor boastful he,
Thirsty for gold, nor feverish for fame.

He went about his work — such work as few

Ever had laid on head and heart and hand —
As one who knows, where there's a task to do,
Man's honest will must Heaven's good grace command;

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

Who trusts the strength will with the burden grow,
That God makes instruments to work His will,
If but that will we can arrive to know,
Nor tamper with the weights of good and ill.

So he went forth to battle, on the side
That he felt clear was Liberty's and Right's,
As in his peasant boyhood he had plied
His warfare with rude nature's thwarting mights —

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

The uncleared forest, the unbroken soil,
The iron-bark, that turns the laborer's axe,
The rapid that o'er bears the boatman's toil,
The prairie, hiding the mazed wanderer's tracks,

The ambushed Indian, and the prowling bear —
Such were the needs that helped his youth to train:
Rough culture — but such trees large fruit may bear,
If but their stocks be of right girth and grain.

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

So he grew up, a destined work to do,
And lived to do it; four long-suffering years,
Ill-fate, ill-fortune, ill-report, lived through,
And then he heard the hisses change to cheers,

The taunts to tribute, the abuse to praise,
And took both with the same unwavering mood:
Till, as he came on light, from darkling days,
And seemed to touch the goal from where he stood,

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

A felon hand, between the goal and him,
Reached from behind his back, a trigger prest —
And those perplexed and patient eyes were dim,
Those gaunt, long-laboring limbs were laid to rest!

The words of mercy were upon his lips,
Forgiveness in his heart and on his pen,
When this vile murderer brought swift eclipse
To thoughts of peace on earth, good-will to men.

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

The Old World and the New, from sea to sea,
Utter one voice of sympathy and shame!
Sore heart, so stopped when it at last beat high,
Sad life, cut short just as its triumph came.

A deed accurst! Strokes have been struck before
By the assassin's hand, whereof men doubt
If more of horror or disgrace they bore ;
But thy foul crime, like Cain's, stands darkly out,

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : A T R I B U T E

Vile hand, that brandest murder on a strife,
 Whate'er its grounds, stoutly and nobly striven ;
And with the martyr's crown crownest a life
 With much to praise, little to be forgiven !

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